Which repetition?

Mladen Dolar

Draft version of a text in progress

In 1964 Lacan held his *Seminar XI*, which, since its publication almost a decade later (1973, the first of Lacan's seminars to be published), became probably his best known and most widely read text. At that point, in 1964, Lacan (then aged 63) already had a long trajectory behind him: a long career as a practicing psychoanalyst; a long career as a writer and a theorist, who has at that point written the great majority of texts which would two years later, in 1966, constitute the bulk of his volume *Écrits*, his *opus magnum*; a considerable career as a teacher, who had been conducting his seminar weekly during the ten previous years, and this seminar had become a focus of theoretical elaboration not only for the analysts, but for a number of French philosophers and intellectuals; and also a long experience of the shifts and rifts of psychoanalytic institutions, being himself the subject of two splits and exclusions from the official analytic organizations. It was as a consequence of such an exclusion, indeed an excommunication, which took place in the autumn 1963, that the *Seminar XI* was held under very special circumstances: Lacan was not only excluded from the French and international psychoanalytic organizations, but also denied the hospitality of the hospital, to use this pun, Hôpital de Sainte-Anne, in which the seminar was previously held. Given his growing fame and notoriety this produced a public uproar, his friends and supporters came to his rescue, and it didn't take long for him to be offered a new place to continue his teaching, and this place happened to be one of the most prestigious places of the entire French academia, École normale supérieure. The new prominent place entailed a new and much larger audience for his teaching, and the scandal produced a new limelight, a large public interest for this new hero with the aura of a banned master. The occasion was such that it called for summing up, for a succinct presentation of the basics of psychoanalysis as he conceived it, and the seminar was most appropriately given the title *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis*. The very title promised to go to the core, to bring the complexity and ramification of psychoanalytic insights and practices to just four basic concepts on which he wanted to rest his case. These four concepts are, as it is well-known, the unconscious, the repetition, the transference and the drive.

The choice of the four concepts may be to some extent surprising; I cannot go into the reasons behind it, I can perhaps just mark in passing a certain glaring absence, that of the concept of desire, which was a key concept both for the early Freud (who has written *Die Traumdeutung* in defense of the thesis that the dream was *eine Wunscherfüllung*, a fulfillment of desire) and for the early Lacan (one of his earlier seminars was e. g. entitled *The desire and its interpretation*). We may come later to some reasons for this absence, which is not unrelated to the concept of repetition.

On the first page of the session dealing with repetition Lacan poses the question idealism and materialism. He points out that psychoanalysis, at first sight, might appear as an idealist position, since it is supposed to propose an ontology based on the tendencies that are internal to the subject and already given in him – desires, drives, projections etc. As opposed to this he will argue through the whole text for a materialist position which for him hinges on the encounter of the real, or the kernel of the real. The real is the concept on which materialism of psychoanalysis ultimately rests (as opposed to the imaginary and the symbolic). And the elementary vintage experience of the real is that of repetition – the real keeps recurring, popping up, intruding, repeating itself. This is the way of getting to the notion of materialism which is not based on the notion of the matter as the ultimate substance, monism, determinism, mechanical causality etc., but based on a rift. What is it that repeats itself in repetition? There is something elusive about the real (as opposed to the matter which seems to be the most palpable thing at hand), and Lacan speaks about it as an encounter, but which is "an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us". There is a missed encounter, but nevertheless a crucial encounter.

In positing repetition as a core concept of psychoanalysis Lacan in a way followed the model of his teacher, the one whom he proclaimed to have been his only master in matters of psychiatry, namely Clérambault, who has already tried to pin his basic insight into the workings of the psyche to the concept of *automatisme mental*, the mental automatism, as the minimal mechanism from which to disentangle the complexities of psychic life. And of course there was above all the example of Freud himself, who got increasingly interested in the mechanism of repetition, *die Wiederholungszwang*, its mysterious nature, the nature of its compulsion and its tricky relationship to the unconscious. Freud introduced this problem in his paper "Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten" in 1914, and you know the strange and rather spectacular fate that this concept would play in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920), where it seemed to shed an

entirely new light on, or even to overturn, the very foundations of psychoanalysis – hence Freud's later obsession, if this is the word, with the concept of *Todestrieb*, the death-drive, in most of his subsequent work. We can mark that repetition came late in both Freud's and Lacan's work, for both of them it only gradually became a key concept, a pivotal concept, which for both called for a certain transformation of the conceptual groundwork. And we can also mark that repetition entertains a close relationship to another of the four fundamental concepts, that of the drive, *der Trieb* (as well as to the transference, *Übertragung*).

When Lacan introduces the notion of repetition in the fourth session of *Seminar XI* (5 February 1964, three weeks after the beginning), he briefly refers to Freud, but then he quickly moves on to the most venerable philosophical reference, Aristotle's *Physics*. *Philosophus dixit*, as one used to say in the Middle Ages, and Lacan's constant and numerous references to Aristotle retain something of the air of the medieval respect and awe, but also an adamant opposition.[1]

Let me quote the key passage where repetition is introduced (in the next session entitled '*Tyche* and *automaton'*) – I will comment on this passage at length later:

> "First, the *tyche*, which we have borrowed … from Aristotle, who uses it in his search for cause. We have translated it as the encounter with the real. The real is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the *automaton*, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of his concern." (1979, p. 53-4)

The moment repetition is introduced there is a doubling; repetition so to speak redoubles itself, it splits itself. There are two kinds of repetition, although this is perhaps not an appropriate way of describing it; rather, what is repeated is the very rift, the split in the midst of repetition, and the two parts cannot be disentangled, extricated as two separate realms or areas. The experience of repetition is the experience of the repeated split in repetition. Even the most common experience of repetition can quickly lead to its enigmatic nature, its disconcerting and unsettling hidden property, for by repeating one never quite finds the same thing all over again, there is a split which is being (re)produced. ("Répéter, ce n'est pas retrouver la même chose," says Lacan somewhere, simply – to repeat is not to find the same thing again.) The vocabulary to

[1] For Lacan's references to Aristotle cf. Chatelineau (a thesis whose director was none less than Pierre Aubenque, one of the greatest authorities on Aristotle). Cathelineau, Pierre-Christophe (1998), *Lacan, lecteur d'Aristote*, Paris: Association freudienne internationale.

describe this duplicity of repetition is taken from Aristotle's *Physics*, two terms are juxtaposed and pitted against each other, *tyche* and *automaton*. There is a tradition which translated the two terms as chance (or spontaneity, something that happens by itself) for *automaton,* and fortune for *tyche* (the Latin word was *fortuna*, good or bad fortune, *eutychia* and *dystychia*).[2] Both these terms are set against the background of necessity, of the necessary causal link. For what is necessary is determined by a cause, and beyond that there is a realm of hazard, chance, fortune, coincidence, contingency that appears to escape causal determination and pertains to another realm appearing on the margins of normal causality. – In simple and general terms, there is an 'automatic' side to repetition – something which is blindly driven by 'more of the same', inexorably returning to the same place; and then there is a part of repetition which, in a seeming maximum opposition, has to do with coincidence, chance, the unpredictable, the encounter of something one didn't cater for. In one part one gets what one expects, in the other one gets what one wouldn't expect at all.

This is a very free use of Aristotle, who in the Second book of *Physics* uses *tyche* and *automaton* as something which departs from causality proper. And this is the first thing that Lacan points out with these two terms: "Aristotle turns and manipulates two terms that are absolutely resistant to his theory, which is nevertheless the most elaborate that has ever been made on the function of cause" (p. 52). One of the key points which made the glory of Aristotle's philosophy through the ages, through millennia, was indeed his theory of causality, the notorious doctrine of the four causes – *causa formalis*, the formal cause; *causa materialis*, the material cause; *causa efficiens*, the efficient cause; and *causa finalis*, the final cause (pertaining to purposefulness, *Zweck*). This is the doctrine which caused many a headache for countless generations of students of philosophy. After considering these four causes he then in sections 4, 5 and 6 focuses on *tyche* and *automaton,* which are like leftovers of causality, they appear in the cracks of causality, they are not covered by the four causes, they both pertain to the hazy realm of chance and fortune. So with these two concepts repetition is not placed into the realm of normal causes (and hence the predictability of the causal chain), but into something where causes slip,

[2] There is some uncertainty in translations and different terms are used by different translators. In Latin, *tyche* and *automaton* were standardly translated by *fortuna* and *casus*; in French by *la fortune* and *le hasard*; the old German version by Karl Prantl has *der Zufall* and *das Grundlos von Selbst eintretende* (!). Ross suggests *luck* and *chance*, and also considers *random* for automaton.

where they slide. – Lacan, who notoriously had a special talent for writing in thick, incomprehensible and extremely difficult style, also had a knack for short and striking slogans which as if counterbalance the opaqueness of his writing; one of these famous slogans runs: "*Il n'y a de cause que de ce qui cloche*" "There is a cause only in something that doesn't work" (p. 22), or of something that limps, something that goes wrong. The cause, which is at stake in psychoanalysis, is posited as a deviation of causality, there are effects which cannot be ascribed to positive and definable causes, to the canonical matrix of the four Aristotelian causes. The cause is thus set up in opposition to the law, the predictability, the regularity, the rule. The problem of the cause emerges only in the crack of the rule, a break of the standard causality. And this is one way of getting straight to the core of psychoanalysis: the question of the cause of something where the normal causality fails or slips. Indeed the slip, 'the Freudian slip', as the cliché goes, is one of the first manifestations of the unconscious, innocuous as it may appear. It calls for another kind of causality, irreducible to subject's intentions and also irreducible to the causality of nature.

In the second book of *Physics* Aristotle, after spending some time discussing his theory of causality as the way of accounting for phenomena, both natural and cultural (and Aristotle gives indiscriminately examples from both), then moves on to *tyche* and *automaton*, 'chance' and 'spontaneity', whose status is indefinite and cannot be easily circumscribed. Are they a mere addition to causality, to the necessary causal link? A frivolous surplus without consistency? A mere supplement to the course of necessity, added 'by accident'? Or do they bear more far-reaching consequences, do they concern the first principles themselves? Do they threaten to strike causality with contingency? Are they something reducible to the neat classification of the four causes, or do they present a separate domain? Is there another sort of causality to be ascribed to something which seems to have no proper cause? A derailed causality?[3]

[3] One could schematically make a conceptual opposition between *accidentality* and *contingency* – an opposition which stems from much later and is not relevant for Aristotle, where it may only appear on the horizon. Accidentality is a counterpart to substantiality and necessity, not as something which contradicts them, but rather as something which enables the fulfillment of necessity. They form a conceptual pair, up to Kant, who will put *substantia et accidens* on his list of categories a couple of thousand years later. Accident doesn't bring necessity into question, but endows its realization with accidental additions. The true cause of the house is the builder, to take his example, but its particular color or texture is accidental. Contingency, on the other hand, is something which puts into question the very principle of necessity, which is struck by

Aristotle briefly discusses his predecessors, the first Greek philosophers, and what they had to say on this tricky question. Schematically, he seems to consider two opposite theories and to reject them both. – I must add that Aristotle's text, here and overall, is far from being clear, it demands a long exegesis, and there have been countless generations of scholars through the ages who have piled vast masses of commentaries on every line he has written (to say nothing of the question whether he has written any of it at all). I am not even attempting a scholarly exegesis, a discouraging prospect at any time, but merely giving a few indications relevant for our purpose. – The first theory would be that *tyche* and *automaton* don't really exist, or at least not in any significant degree worth mentioning. "Certainly the early physicists found no place for chance among the causes which they recognized – love, strife, mind, fire and the like. This is strange, whether they supposed that there is no such thing as chance or whether they thought there is but omitted to mention it." (196a, 17-21) The first natural philosophers, the founding fathers of philosophy, reputedly founded philosophy with their heroic endeavor to reduce the nature of the universe to first principles, a common *arché*, and chance didn't figure among them or seemed to play no major role. Furthermore, in a somewhat different vein, one can self-evidently adhere to the naturalistic line that every event, no matter how small or trivial, must have an assignable cause (and chance would thus be another name for ignorance). On the other hand there is the theory (attributed to Democritus) which ascribes "the heavenly sphere and all the world to spontaneity (*automaton*). They say that the vortex arose spontaneously, i. e. the motion that separated and arranged in its present order all that exists." (196a, 25-8) They believe "that chance is a cause, but that it is inscrutable to human intelligence, as being a divine thing and full of mystery." (196b, 5-8) Thus the problem would not be whether chance has some bearing and to what extent, but far more dramatically, that everything would exist due to chance, a divine and inscrutable principle. Aristotle briefly argues for the absurdity of this view. – The two views, both ascribed to the early atomists, can be brought together to a common radical view, namely that there is no chance, there is a reason for everything in the universe, except for the universe itself, which was brought about by chance. Once the initial chance has played its role, everything else is strictly determined.

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contingency not merely in its realization, but in the guiding principle itself. It would present the case of a mad builder, to extend the example.

Schematically, Aristotle doesn't espouse either of the two extremes, the one which denies chance altogether, or limits it to the irrelevant, and the one which sees in chance the origin of everything. Which *per negationem* leaves us with the tentative claim that there is a proper area to be assigned to *tyche* and *automaton*, but it doesn't undermine the first principles or the general theory of causality. Aristotle tries to disentangle the two terms, *tyche* and *automaton*, which are in Greek rather close in their meaning and can largely overlap. To make it quick, he assigns *tyche* to beings endowed with intentionality and reason, and reserves *automaton* for things, animals and children (one wonders about women?). *Tyche* is a special case of *automaton*, the one which happens to (reasonable) humans, while *automaton* occurs with mere nature. Here are his examples:

> "A man is engaged in collecting subscriptions for a feast. He would have gone to such and such a place for the purpose of getting the money, if he had known. He actually went there for another purpose, and it was only incidentally that he got his money by going there; and this was not due to the fact that he went there as a rule or necessarily, nor is the end effected (getting the money) a cause present in himself – it belongs to the class of things that are intentional and the result of intelligent deliberation. It is when these conditions are satisfied that the man is said to have gone 'by chance' [*tyche*]." (196b-197a, 33-4)[4]

So the man went somewhere with intention, but not with intention of getting the money, yet by chance he nevertheless got what he wasn't looking for. *Tyche*, a good fortune, appears as a side-effect, a by-product, a bonus of another (intentional) action. It is the non-intended surplus, an extra, of another intentional activity, a serendipity. It is like a *Fehlleistung* in reverse: a bungled action where one happily achieves more than one intended, rather than unhappily giving away one's hidden purposes. But there is also bad fortune which may occur just as easily, causing the unintended side-effect of catastrophe, there is just "a hair's breadth of a difference". So chance, *tyche*, pertains to the realm of intention and reason as its surplus, there is thought, moral action and conscious choice which preside over the emergence of *tyche*. Something could have been chosen, but wasn't, yet it happened nevertheless. It is an incidental cause, yet not strictly speaking a true cause, although it is contrary to a rule. "For 'rule' applies to what is always true or true for the most part, whereas chance belongs to a third type of event." (197a, 18-20) So there

[4] Another Aristotelian example: a man digs a hole to plant a tree and by chance discovers a treasure. *Metaphysics*, 1025a.

is a to-and-fro, it is a kind of cause and it is not, it is contrary to rule yet without establishing another kind of rule.

Automaton, spontaneity, is a wider term, chance is like the spontaneity for those capable of moral action.[5] "Hence what is not capable of moral action cannot do anything by chance. Thus an inanimate thing or a lower animal or a child cannot do anything by chance, because it is incapable of deliberate intention; nor can 'good fortune' or 'ill fortune' be ascribed to them." (197b, 5-8) Examples:

> "We say, for example, that the horse came 'spontaneously', because, though his coming saved him, he did not come for the sake of safety. Again, the tripod fell 'of itself', because, though when it fell it stood on its feet so as to serve for a seat, it did not fall for the sake of that." (197b, 15-18)

A horse may save his life by taking a certain path, but he didn't intend it; a tripod my collapse for no reason at all, just like that, or a falling stone may incidentally strike someone. There are glitches pertaining to natural causality, there is what the old German translation suggests, *das grundlos von selbst Eintretende* in the realm of nature. The difference is that in the case of *tyche* there is a relation to an internal cause (an intention), whereas with *automaton* causality is external, it is deprived of a *causa finalis* of an inner purpose.

The outcome of these reflections is finally that *tyche* and *automaton* result from intelligence and nature respectively, yet they do so only incidentally.

> "Now since nothing which is incidental is prior to what is *per se*, it is clear that no incidental cause can be prior to a cause *per se*. Spontaneity and chance, therefore, are posterior to intelligence and nature. Hence, however true it may be that the heavens are due to spontaneity, it will still be true that intelligence and nature will be prior causes of the All and of many things in it besides." (198a, 7-13)

It is like opening a Pandora's box and closing it again; letting the spirit out of the bottle and squeezing it back into it again. *Tyche* and *automaton*, whatever may be said of them, are still derivative, they are secondary and cannot put into question the primary. There is a separate realm, disturbing in its indefiniteness, but ultimately, 'at the end of the day', it has no bearing upon intelligence and nature, it doesn't upset the first principles, and it doesn't disrupt causality.

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[5] "They differ in that 'spontaneity' is the wider term. Every result of chance is from what is spontaneous, but not everything that is from what is spontaneous is from chance." (197a, 36-9)

Lacan takes up Aristotle's argument from the second book of *Physics* with the simple claim that what Aristotle describes as *tyche* and *automaton* exceeds his theory of four causes. The two terms cannot be accounted for by his theory of causality, which is "the most elaborate that has ever been made on the function of cause". So the two terms are apt for a new use, to account for something which occurs in repetition and which has to do with a derailment of causality, not its smooth run. The smooth run of causality may well account for both nature and intelligence, with the different versions of natural and intentional causality, but what occurs in repetition runs counter to both. And this is what constitutes the proper domain of psychoanalysis at its minimal: phenomena which are irreducible to intentionality, to *causa finalis*, to conscious intentions, and which are at the same time irreducible to the causality of nature, to natural processes beyond conscious control, to the somatic. Neither consciousness nor nature; neither the (conscious) mind nor the body. In a nutshell, what psychoanalysis is interested in is always something which happens 'by coincidence', 'by chance', yet it keeps recurring, it keeps repeating itself, but without constituting a positive causality apart, while irreducible to both natural and conscious causality. It has its logic, but no substance. And there is a paradox at the bottom of this: Freud emphatically insisted on the strict determinism of all psychic facts, the slightest slip and the tiniest chance event are determined, yet there appears, within this determinism, a cause which is neither conscious nor natural, which escapes this divide yet without therefore establishing a separate positive domain.

From here on the Aristotelian terms are at our disposal to be given a new twist, and while it's easy to see why Lacan used the two terms, it's a bit hard to see why he used them the way he did. Let me go back to the initial quote:

> "First, the *tyche*, which we have borrowed … from Aristotle, who uses it in his search for cause. We have translated it as the encounter with the real. The real is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the *automaton*, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of his concern." (1979, p. 53-4)

Two kinds of repetition are distinguished and pitted against each other: *automaton* pertains to the symbolic, to the realm of signs, their insistence, their iterativity, their return; while *tyche* pertains to the real, the encounter, the chance encounter, the unpredictable – and since it presents the part of chance and coincidence, it seems to be at the opposite end of automatism. We

can see that the use of *tyche* can be largely conflated with Aristotle's term, and with what the tradition has called (good or bad) fortune or luck. It is an encounter beyond intention. But the use of *automaton* definitely takes great liberty with the Aristotelian term, it doesn't pertain to nature and spontaneity, but to our second nature, to our embeddedness in the symbolic circuit which determines our social being and shapes our actions and understanding, behind our back. It doesn't belong to either consciousness or nature, but something blindly driven 'by itself' in a circle of repetition. From *automaton* it retains the notion of 'by itself',[6] and a notion of pertaining to 'chance' rather than to necessity (arbitrary, as Saussure would have it), being neither conscious nor natural, constituting another kind of necessity out of its chance character. This is the feat of the symbolic: to set up a derivative necessity, as it were, on the basis of something contingent.

The symbolic repetition can be grasped on two levels: first it is inscribed in the very nature of signs – the sign is a sign only insofar as it can be repeated, iterativity is essential to its nature, a one-time occurrence is not a sign. And second, signs keep recurring, returning in certain ways, because they are driven by what Freud called the pleasure principle. They are driven to keep coming back to provide more of the same, to lead back to the site of satisfaction. At the simplest, to take Lacan's example (following Freud), children want the same story told again and again, interminably, always in the same form.

> "It can be seen in the child, in his first movement, at the moment when he is formed as a human being, manifesting himself as an insistence that the story should always be the same, that its recounted realization should be ritualized, that is to say, textually the same." (P. 61)

So the *automaton* as the domain of the symbolic is governed by the pleasure principle. Yet within this symbolic mechanism, driven by a 'spontaneity' of its own, there is another kind of repetition which pertains to the encounter and stumbles upon another dimension, that of the real. If the symbolic repetition of *automaton* is subject to the pleasure principle, then this other repetition would touch upon the realm of what Freud called "beyond the pleasure principle".

Freud in his early days posited that the pleasure principle was what ruled psychic life. Psyche would 'spontaneously' seek pleasure, this was its inherent 'automatism', and he saw the basic conflict being played out between the pleasure principle on the one hand and the reality

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[6] And perhaps the notion of *maten* as 'in vain' or 'nonsense', as Cathelineau insists (1998, p. 303) – a false etimology of *-maton* which is made and used by Aristotle.

principle on the other. What was opposed to the pleasure-seeking psyche was the harsh reality to which it had to adapt, it had to invent strategies to get pleasure through a compromise with the hostile reality (cf. "Formulierungen über die zwei Prinzipien des psychischen Geschehens", 1911). So all the tribulations of psychic life could be ultimately accounted for by the ongoing conflict between these two principles. Yet he gradually came to abandon this view as simplistic, arguing that the two principles are not really in irreconcilable conflict, it is rather so that the reality principle is a safeguard of the pleasure principle, it takes care that the pleasure-seeking can be effectually realized in harsh conditions of reality. Maybe they present just two conflicting faces of the same complex and can be brought together under the same heading, that of pleasure-and-reality principle. But if the psychic life is ultimately based on a conflict, a constant strife, then the two parties in conflict would have to be defined in a different way. This is the point he has reached with *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920), where what is beyond the pleasure principle is equally beyond the reality principle. Something keeps recurring in psychic life, repeating itself against all odds, something keeps disturbing the homeostasis towards which both pleasure and reality principles keep striving in their collaboration and compromise, something which neither yields pleasure nor adapts to reality. (And this is what Clérambault, in the late twenties, named *l'automatisme mental*.) Freud envisaged this through the recurrence of trauma, the recurring traumatic event being neither part of reality nor pleasurable, anything but, and he eventually posited a new duality that supplanted the old one, the duality between Eros and Thanatos, between life drives and death drives, the duality which would define a lot of his later endeavor (cf. particularly *Civilization and its discontents*, 1929). I will not go into the problematic nature of this new view of the basic conflict and the host of questions that it raises.

One can take a different thread, a less gloomy one, to illustrate what is at stake in Lacan's passage, namely the comical repetition. Repetition is one of the great devices of comedy, and Bergson, in his famous and admirable essay on laughter, spends quite some time wondering how such a simple thing can be so effective and so enigmatic.[7] Some of the most famous lines by Molière, e. g., which have passed into French proverbs, owe their fame precisely to their repetition in particular pieces. '*Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?*' 'What the hell was

[7] Here I must refer to a magisterial development of this in Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In*, Cambridge (Mass.): MIT, 2008. – Bergson takes up the simplest example proposed by Pascal: Why is it that two equal faces, being placed side by side, give the impression of the comical, whereas there is nothing comical about one at the time?

he doing on that galley?' is repeated no less than seven times in *Scapin* (II/7),[8] '*Sans dot*', 'without dowry', is repeated four times by Harpagon in *The miser* (I/5), 'And Tartuffe? Poor man' is repeated four times in *Tartuffe* (I/4) etc. In all these cases each new repetition of the same line becomes funnier, as if a snowball effect would gather along the line, with each new occurrence of the same. To take a more up-to-date example, in the TV series *'allo 'allo*, very popular in the nineties, there is a person who appears at some point in every episode and gives exactly the same line: 'Listen very carefully, I shall say this only once!', a line which has inevitably turned into proverb. Of course the line is all the funnier since its repetition, which occurs with a clockwork precision, immediately contradicts its content, namely the affirmation that it will not be repeated but told only once. We know of course that the thing will happen in the next episode, we know, when the woman appears, exactly what she will say, and she says it – yet we cannot be but surprised, we are always taken by surprise, caught unawares, we cannot resist the laughter, in its very stupidity and infinite repetition it is unstoppable, it always unfailingly gets us by the simplest of means. And here is maybe the gist of repetition: its clockwork precision and yet its unpredictability, its surprise; one gets surprised by what was utterly expected.

It seems that what is repeated is getting funnier with each repetition as if an invisible addition has been appended each time in its very sameness, repetition has a cumulative effect, as if the very absence of its meaning gathers new meaning. The thing is repeated meaninglessly, against all odds, no new information is added, yet repetition produces novelty and surprise. This novelty can then itself be used as a starting point for the mechanism of inversion, where repetition takes place with a different or inverted set of characters. Molière uses this often when the same piece of dialogue appears between masters and then between servants (or vice versa), or the same line used by one person is then used by his interlocutor against that person, thus turning the tables on its author. The inversion, the displaced or reversed repetition can be seen as a 'reflection into itself' of the novelty inherent in the very mechanism of repetition. It uses this novelty to produce a new situation while the comical effect entirely depends on what is repeated, that which insists and remains the same in all different worlds.

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[8] Molière was one of the greatest plagiarists of all times, surpassed in that art only by Shakespeare. The famous line, and its repetition, is taken from *Le pédant joué* by Cyrano de Bergerac.

If *automaton* pertains to the repetition as symbolic and the tendency to repeat the pleasurable, and if *tyche* pertains to the register of a chance encounter, the encounter of the real, then the whole point is that one shouldn't read it as two different sorts of repetition or as placed on two different levels; they only exist together and intertwined. To put it simply, *tyche* is the gap of the *automaton*. In the tiny gap between one occurrence and the next one, a bit of real is produced. In every repetition there is already, in a minimal way, the emergence of that which escapes symbolization, the haphazard contingent object appears which spoils the mere repeating of the same, so the same which returns is never the same although we couldn't tell it apart from its previous occurrence by any of the positive features or distinguishing marks. There is a contingent bit which dwells in the gap, which is produced by the very gap, and this imperceptible bit is the stuff that comedy puts to maximum use. It uses it as a surplus, a bonus, which arises as if from nowhere, by the mere cunning of repetition, in the mere in-between, in the gap which is never just the gap.

I must briefly point out that Deleuze's take on repetition, although starting from different presuppositions, in many ways overlaps with Lacan's basic stance, as developed four years earlier (Deleuze being probably unaware of this?). Deleuze's *Difference and repetition* appeared in the spring of 1968 and one could take it as a most curious counterpart to the May '68. It can be taken as the most important contemporary philosophical work written on repetition. It proposes broad lines of a grand narrative: repetition is a post-Hegelian problem, coming to replace, displace, undo the Hegelian problem of *Aufhebung*, sublation, which is also a repetition where a conceptual deadlock keeps recurring on ever new levels, and is resolved by the triple movement of *Aufhebung* – suppressing, retaining, lifting up. But with Hegel *Aufhebung* is based on the accumulation of sense, sense is made out of the impasse, there is a progress of spirit, the ever higher levels to encompass all regions of being and all human experience, history etc. Repetition, as opposed to that, is not the production or accumulation of sense, it is something that keeps recurring, insisting, undoing the bounds of sense. Three authors that were the first to envisage this problem clearly are Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Freud, in very different ways, but there is a deployment of the problem and a conceptual evolvement through the three authors (with the addition of Marx and Péguy). Something insists in repetition that cannot be cashed out in making

sense, but is paradoxically a lever of the new, transformation, change, although repetition seems to be the opposite, the recurrence of the same. It steps into the shoes of *Aufhebung*, overturning it.

On the very first page, after Preface, Deleuze immediately starts with a statement which makes roughly the point compatible with Lacan's main take: "Repetition is not a generality" (p. 1). What does this mean? The repetition that Deleuze is after is not based on the similarity or the equivalence of what is repeated, the similarity which can serve as the basis of generalization. Science, e. g., is possible only as the science about the general, i.e. about what is repeatable with regularity, generality based on equivalence and systematic possibility of substitution. In a scientific experiment one distills that what can be repeated by anyone, anywhere, at any time, and one systematically excludes the accidental circumstances, the contingent, so science, in its generality, is based upon the guarantee of the repeatable. But this is not the sort of repetition that Deleuze is interested in; what he aims at is the singular in repetition, that what cannot be exchanged or substituted, not the law which is but an empty form of variability – in line with Lacan's view of *tyche*, where *tyche* and *automaton* are placed precisely outside of normal causality and only so applicable to repetition. Deleuze draws up two pairs: particular-general and singular-universal. "Generality, as generality of the particular, thus stands opposed to repetition as universality of the singular." If science works within the scope of the first pair, then in repetition proper there is like a short circuit between the singular and the universal. "If repetition is possible, it is due to miracle rather than to law" (p. 2). Something is being repeated apart from the law, regardless of the law, transgressing the law. "If repetition exists, it expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular, a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation and an eternity opposed to permanence. In every respect repetition is transgression." (p. 3). It follows that what is being repeated has no assignable identity, we cannot pin it down to positive traits and cannot control its repetition as in a scientific experiment. So Deleuze on the first pages of his book posits the problem of repetition in terms which are congruous and analogical with the way Lacan saw the problem a few years earlier. Repetition is pitted against the law, regularity and causality, and it poses the problem of the impossibility of spelling out the identity of what is repeated. It appears in a discontinuity, a break in the causal chain.[9]

[9] Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are the first ones to have seen this problem. Despite their evident differences there are four common traits (p. 6-8): 1. Repetition brings novelty, transformation and

The novelty that repetition entails brings us to the second great philosophical source that Lacan uses, Kierkegaard's small book on repetition (*Gentagelse*, 1843). Kierkegaard and Freud have nothing in common. To my knowledge Freud never mentions Kierkegaard (nor the other way round, for that matter). Yet, if one looks at the dates, one can see that only six months separate Kierkegaard's death, in November 1855, and Freud's birth in May 1856. If one was to give any credence to metempsychosis, the Platonic belief in the transmigration of souls, one could imagine Kierkegaard's troubled soul looking for a new embodiment and finding it in the most unlikely place, the fervent Christian soul finding its reincarnation in a godless Jew, as Freud described himself (murmuring perhaps the immortal Monty Python line 'and now for something completely different'), for one could nevertheless, despite the radically different context, disentangle a common agenda that is played out and where Freud, unwittingly no doubt, takes up a thread that was left suspended in the air by Kierkegaard.[10]

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change. The question of freedom is at stake. 2. Repetition is opposed to the laws of nature, cycles and seasons. This is not the return of the same in natural cycles nor the regularity of the natural laws. 3. Repetition is opposed to the moral law, the Kantian imperative and its criterion of universalization in general legislation. It aims rather at the suspension of the moral law (hence Kierkegaard's leap of faith, Abraham etc. and Nietzsche's beyond good and evil). 4. Repetition is opposed to habit and memory, to the ancient reminiscence, anamnesis, and to habitus as the modern form – repetition is the thought of future (hence forgetting can become a positive power). – This is what both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have in common, but from there the consequences they draw are the opposite: for Nietzsche the death of god and the dissolution of the self, for Kierkegaard the leap to god and the rediscovered self ("Nietzsche's leading idea is to ground the repetition in eternal return on both the death of God and the dissolution of the self. However, it is a quite different alliance in the theatre of faith: Kierkegaard dreams of an alliance between a God and a self rediscovered." P. 11). With Freud the problem recurs as the problem of the death drive, which in Deleuze's reading is a 'transcendental principle' as opposed to the pleasure principle which is merely 'psychological'. But this demands a much larger elaboration.

[10] Freud and Kierkegaard have no common measure, but they anecdotically have a point in common: they both admired Nestroy. Johann Nepomuk Nestroy, the nineteenth century comedy writer, who is now largely forgotten (except in Austria where he is still performed sometimes), was much admired and in vogue at the time of both. Kierkegaard tells us in *Repetition* (p. 155) how enthusiastic he was when he learned that a farce by Nestroy (*Der Talisman*) would be played in Königstadt Theatre in Berlin (the piece is actually from the same year, 1843), and Freud quoted him many times, almost a century later. I will take up just one quote from one of his plays (*Der Zerrissene*) which Freud uses in "Constructions in Analysis" (1937). It is a line repeated throughout the play, and thus becoming funnier each next time, with the snowball effect of repetition. It is repeated by a servant, by way of his universal response to any questions or problems which may arise: "*Im Laufe der Begebenheiten wird alles klar werden*". "In the course

Taking up the thread of repetition, we can take the cue from Freud's 1914 text "Remembering, repeating and working through" ("Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten"). Repeating, to follow Freud, is something very different from remembering, actually opposed to it, for if we remember something, we can lay it to rest and assign it a place, while if we repeat it then we stand in an unresolved affective relation to something past, and this unresolved kernel pushes us to act, *agieren*, says Freud, to enact it, to re-enact it in our behavior. The psychoanalytic symptom is precisely this: a re-enactment of something that cannot find its place in memory and persecutes us in our actions, against our will, without us being aware of its nature. In this paper Freud speaks for the first time about the compulsion to repeat, *Wiederholungszwang*, or the automatism of repetition, which will gain so much significance in his subsequent work. If we repeat something, this means that we cannot take a distance to it, it doesn't leave us in peace, we cannot draw a clear line between past and present, as one can in memory, which is based on such a line. Repetition pertains to a past which forces its way into the present, a past which refuses to be past and be laid to rest. But why do we repeat? Freud's answer, at this point in his work and simply put, is this: we repeat because we cannot remember. There are elements in our past which have been traumatic and hence repressed, they couldn't be integrated into memory, and this repression, this expulsion from memory, is what forces us to repeat the repressed. If we could remember it the past would stop haunting us, we could integrate it into the symbolic, it would cease to be censored and repressed, we could thus be liberated from the compulsion to repeat it. "The patient doesn't *remember* the forgotten and the repressed, but *enacts* it [*agiere*]. He doesn't reproduce it as a memory, but as an action, he *repeats* it, of course not conscious that he repeats it." (Slov., p. 143)[11] Thus repetition emerges precisely at the place of a lacking memory, it sneaks into a hole in remembering, and hence the goal of the therapy would be to fill in this hole and thus to do away with the necessity of repetition. Repetition thus in a way follows from the very notion of the unconscious: we repeat because something is not

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of events everything will become clear." One can take it as a slogan of repetition, in the spirit of anticipated trust in its enigmatic mechanism and its power by the thrust of its perseverance.

[11] Freud comes back to this idea time and time again, e. g. in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920) where repetition is the central problem: "The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it. … He is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past." (PFL 11, p. 288)

available to consciousness, there is a missing link, a lacking signifier or representation, and its lack, more precisely its repression, is the spring of repetition. This is no simple lack, for what is erased and repressed has the fatal hang of imposing itself, finding its way back to our lives, it insists and keeps being repeated. If we had an integral memory, a total recall, without lacunae or gaps, we wouldn't be forced to repeat. We repeat because we are endowed with the unconscious. We are not the agents of repetition, we are driven by an unconscious force which is itself driven by a structural gap, a lack in memory, so that remembering this missing bit would allow us to turn into the forgers of our own fortune and to be liberated from alien forces. The aim of the psychoanalytic treatment would thus be to re-establish the lacking piece of memory, to integrate it back into the symbolic, to repair the hole – ultimately, to make the unconscious conscious and thus to do away with it; to heal the wound of the unconscious, to lift the censorship, to restore what went missing. Freud himself was well aware that such a view is insufficient, for bringing back the missing piece doesn't automatically produce a miraculous recovery, hence the third term of the title of his paper, the working through, *durcharbeiten*. One can inform the patient about the missing piece, or help him remember it, yet without a process of working through this may not have the salutary effect of lifting the symptoms and stopping the repetition. "Mere naming doesn't by itself bring about immediate cessation." (P. 148) The return of the repressed memory by itself doesn't heal, it takes a lot of work to make it work, so a new kind of repetition of this repressed material is needed that conditions the working through, this time as a conscious effort.

If we put the problem in these terms – and this is the problem that stands at the very core of psychoanalysis –, we can see that Freud maintains something that is directly opposed to the view of repetition that Kierkegaard proposed in his astounding booklet on repetition some 70 years earlier, in 1843. There Kierkegaard starts precisely at the same point, by scrutinizing the relationship between memory and repetition, and from the outset, on the first page, he states the following: "Repetition and remembering are the same step, but in the opposite direction; for what we remember is something that has been, it is repeated backwards; conversely, actual repetition is remembering forwards." (Slov., p. 129) So remembering and repetition are ultimately the same thing, only inverse: in memory one repeats something past, retroactively, while repetition opens up a future, it pushes forwards. This is a paradoxical claim, for one may well think that the recurrence of the past is something that defines repetition – one only has to do with repetition if there is a reproduction of something that has already been, a past event or model, otherwise it

wouldn't make sense to call it repetition. Yet, for Kierkegaard, if repetition is like prospective memory, a forwards memory, then one could say that thereby one 'remembers' something that hasn't been yet, that there is a novelty that emerges through the very process of repetition, something that hasn't been encapsulated in the past model that one repeats. Repetition is not the force of the past that determines us, but rather a way of escaping that determination. It looks at the future, something that hasn't been. (In a curious echo, Marx, some ten years later, in 1852, on the famous spot where he discusses repetition in history in his *Eighteenth Brumaire*, also maintained that the proper repetition, the repetition involved in proletarian revolution, "draws its poetry from the future", as opposed to the bourgeois revolutions which had to emulate past models. This paradox is something that ultimately pertains to the very notion of revolution, which initially meant 'coming back to the same place'. So we have, in a very different context, structurally the same problem of repetition being caught between the past and the very possibility of a different future.) Thus Kierkegaard's conclusion is directly opposite to Freud's: "So repetition, if it is possible, makes one happy, while remembering renders one unhappy, that is, if one takes time for living at all and doesn't already at birth look for excuses to escape from it, claiming that one has forgotten something." (P. 129-30) If one has forgotten something already at birth (maybe the unconscious is precisely this, something missing, a fatal lack in memory already at the birth of the subject, coinciding with the birth of the subject), then one can spend one's life in strenuous efforts to remember it, recuperate the lost bit, but this is the perfect excuse to evade life, trying in vain to retrieve something that is irretrievably lost. Life is on the side of repetition, not of memory ("he who chose repetition, he lives", p. 131), and there is the emphatic moment of happiness attached to it: he who is preoccupied with memory is doomed to misery, always nostalgically trying to salvage something lost, while only repetition can lead to a prospect of happiness. Remembering is an unhappy occupation, it doesn't liberate but enslaves with its melancholy loss. "Memory has the great advantage that it starts with the loss, so it doesn't have to fear anything for it has nothing to lose." (P.135) It is stuck with the loss that it cherishes, hence endowed with melancholy whose venerated object is precisely the loss as such, loss objectified (that would be Freud's reading). (One is "melancholy like a police official," says Kierkegaard, thus proposing an intriguing subject which hasn't been treated yet, despite the great vogue for the theme of melancholy: 'Melancholy and police'.)

The time vector in Kierkegaard is directly opposite to Freud's: repetition is not the determination of the past from which one cannot escape, so that only the restoration of memory could rescue us from its tentacles and its misery, it rather brings forth the new and the unforeseen, it liberates us precisely from memory. So to sum up: for Freud restoring memory is the best (and the only) way to prevent the unhappy fate of repetition; for Kierkegaard, repetition is the best way to avoid the unhappy fate of memory and provide a prospect of happiness.

In this opposition between memory and repetition the stakes are high for Kierkegaard. As he states already on the first page: "… repetition is the essential expression for what the Greeks called reminiscence. In the same way as they taught that cognition was only remembering, so the new philosophy teaches that all life is repetition." (P. 129) So what is at stake, ultimately, is the very divide between the ancient and the modern philosophy, where the ancient philosophy is ultimately pinned down to the Platonic paradigm of *anamnesis*, that is, the assumption that all knowledge is already there, one only has to remember it, one only has to properly search one's soul and dig out the eternal ideas which are already embedded in it, or embedded in some structure (what Hegel, e. g., would call the 'in itself', though the context is different), which only needs to be spelled out. Thus Socrates, the great guiding figure for Kierkegaard, with his maieutic method, needs only to be the midwife who helps people with bringing out the ideas that they already possess, albeit unwittingly and in a blurred way. The task of the teacher is to help us to bring forth what we already know, what we have known since always, the truth that has been there since ever, although buried, hidden, disguised and distorted. So Socrates' midwifery (i. e. maieutics) is the fight against our failing memory, a bit like in Freud's description, a strenuous effort to restore what we tend to forget, and thus to counteract the repetition of received views and opinions, to work against the repetition of doxa in which we are caught. The whole theory of *anamnesis* posits a soul which already possesses the reproductions of eternal ideas that the maieutic method only helps to unveil, the ideas which pre-exist our process of knowledge, and the highest relation to another person is that of a midwife who helps him to reveal the hidden.[12] And Socrates is "the midwife examined and approved by God himself" (*Philosophical crumbs*, p.14). "From the Socratic point of view every starting point in time is *eo ipso* contingent, negligible, an occasion" (p. 15), it doesn't concern the eternal truth itself. The teacher is but an

[12] Cf. the vocabulary definition of maieutics in Shorter: "the Socratic process of helping a person to bring into full consciousness conceptions previously latent in his mind."

occasion, a contingent beginning of knowledge, and his grandeur is in effacing himself in face of the truth which the pupil discovers in himself. The teacher refuses to be an authority, he claims only to know nothing. He doesn't dispense a doctrine, he dissuades at the most, he is just the ladder to be discarded in the essentially auto-didactic process. From the Socratic point of view it is of no importance who the teacher is, this is the part of anecdote, and Socrates' greatness is in the fact that he ascribes himself such a tiny, modest, almost negligible role. [In the maximum opposition to the figure of Socrates, there is the figure of Christ – not an idea that one should remember, but essentially an encounter – this is the paramount Kierkegaard's theme.]

This paradigm, outlined in broad strokes, stretches from Plato's *Menon* up to Hegel, for in Kierkegaard's reading Hegel is the last of the philosophers who was still prey to this paradigm. Hegel's system could be read in this light as a constant endeavor to develop what is always already there. Hegel's method would ultimately be that of the explicitation of the implicit (a formula that Brandom and MacDowell would amply use), the dialectical progression of what is already implicitly encapsulated in the 'in itself' and merely needs to become 'for itself', in a seamless self-development of spirit's inner capacities. For Hegel, like for Socrates, only on a different level, in a different sense and with different means, knowledge essentially operates in the mode of 'always already', the progress of knowledge is made by realizing what was 'in itself' already contained in the previous term, so the function of each next term is to make that clear 'for itself'. To make 'for itself' what was 'in itself' – we always already had what we wanted to achieve, and we achieve it on the long way of realizing this. Knowledge is produced by making explicit what is already implicitly encapsulated. – I will leave aside here the reasons why in my view this reading of Hegel is largely inadequate, why it doesn't capture Hegel's basic procedure and how Kierkegaard was actually much closer to Hegel than he could imagine.

Against all this long tradition, with all its different facets ancient and recent, Kierkegaard proposes the remedy of repetition, repetition not as repeating something always already there, but precisely as a way to break out of its circle. Repetition requires great courage, says Kierkegaard, as opposed to the complacency of letting oneself be driven, it is the production of novelty, as opposed to the (Hegelian) philosophy which can only proceed immanently. If repetition cannot be immanently developed from what was already there, then it follows that it can only be transcendence: "New philosophy [i. e. Hegel] never makes a new step, it usually only makes a lot of noise [*goere ophaevelse*, there is a pun, for *ophavelse* is the Danish translation for the

Hegelian *Aufhebung*], and if it makes a step, then only in immanence, but repetition has always been and always will be a transcendence." (P. 188)[13]

But if repetition doesn't reproduce something preexistent, what is it then that is being repeated? Constantin Constantius, the author of *Repetition*, goes back to Berlin, like Kierkegaard, where he has been some years ago, he wants to repeat his previous experience, but at each step he fails to recapture the old and the known. Repetition fails, so from this he can only draw the conclusion that there is no repetition, it is impossible to repeat anything – yet this conclusion is misleading, for what kept repeating itself was precisely the very impossibility of repetition. This is Kierkegaard's brilliant speculative formulation: "My discovery had no meaning, yet it was disconcerting: for I discovered that there is no repetition and I was confirmed in this since it kept repeating itself in all possible ways." (P. 174) So what kept repeating itself was not some past identical experience or object, but the very impossibility to find it again and repeat it. If one follows this line, there is no identity to what is being repeated, nothing that one can get hold of, pin down and identify, and precisely this impossibility produces the gap in the continuity of experience and knowledge where something new can emerge, and where the old can be transformed.

But to come back to psychoanalysis and to our staging of the encounter between Kierkegaard and Freud: the two paradigms seem to be exclusive, Freud relying on memory in order to dismantle repetition, and Kierkegaard proposing repetition as the best antidote against the pitfalls of memory. Whom to follow?

Curiously, Jacques Lacan always took sides with Kierkegaard, as opposed to Freud, on this tricky issue, and maintained that psychoanalysis should be properly understood precisely

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[13] Cf. Žižek: "Perhaps one should return here to the well-known Kierkegaardian opposition beween Socratic *reminiscence* and Christian *repetition*. The Socratic philosophical principle is the one of reminiscence: the Truth already dwells deep inside me, and in order to discover it I have only to look deep into my soul, to get to 'know myself'. The Christian Truth, in contrast, is the one of Revelation, which is the exact opposite of reminiscence: Truth is not inherent, it is not the (re)discovery of what is already in myself, but an Event, something violently imposed on me from the Outside through a traumatic encounter that shatters the very foundations of my being. … In contrast to misleading first impressions, psychoanalytic treatment is, at its most fundamental, not the path of remembrance, of the return to the inner repressed truth, its bringing to light; its crucial moment, that of 'traversing the fantasy', rather, designates the subject's (symbolic) *rebirth*, his (re-)creation ex nihilo, a jump through the 'zero-point' of death drive to the thoroughly new symbolic configuration of his being." (Žižek, *The ticklich subject*, 1999, p. 212)

under the auspices of repetition. He returned time and time again to Kierkegaard's book on repetition, always making a clear point: the Freudian discovery, despite Freud's self-understanding, should be placed on the side of repetition, as opposed to the Platonic reminiscence (however widely understood). In psychoanalysis the point is not the recovery of memory, of the censored and repressed chapters of one's history: one doesn't fall ill because of forgetting, and one is not healed by remembering, by the reconstruction of the chain of memory to include the censored chapters, to fill in the gaps. Only repetition has the capacity to transform the past and to produce the new, which is the ultimate aim of therapy, hence one has to espouse Kierkegaard's view on this essential point.[14]

Already in the early *Seminar II* (1954/55) we can read the following:

> "The man finds his way not on the way of reminiscence, but on the way of repetition. It is here that Kierkegaard paves the way of our Freudian institutions by his small book on repetition. … Freud distinguishes two entirely different structurations of our human experience – the one which I have named, with Kierkegaard, the way of Antiquity, reminiscence, which presupposes an accord, a harmony between the man and the world of his objects, which makes that he recognizes them because in a way he has always known them – and, as opposed to that, the conquest, the structuration of the world through the effort of work, by way of repetition." (Lacan, *Le moi dans la théorie de Freud*, Seuil 1978, p. 110, 124-5)

To follow this line of argument, Plato's anamnesis would thus be on the side of the imaginary, the play of mirror and recognition: we recognize what we have always known, if unwittingly, there is a harmony between the knowing subject and the known. Knowledge would be tantamount to recognizing something already there, the hitherto unknown converted into the known by recognizing it as such. As opposed to this, repetition, for Lacan in that period (he would change this view subsequently), belongs to the symbolic, it cuts into the recognition, it cuts through the continuity and installs a gap, a void, which is not merely a deficiency, but something that allows a restructuring and calls for the work that is needed for that. Freud, if properly understood, should be placed on the side of repetition rather than promoting the recovery of memory.

Lacan is even more decisive in the introduction to the analysis of Poe's "Purloined Letter"

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[14] For Deleuze's criticism of Freud's take on repetition as caused by repression, a single quote can suffice as an indication: "I do not repeat because I repress, I repress because I repeat…" (P. 18)

(1956):

> "Freud thus situates himself right from the outset in the opposition Kierkegaard taught us about, regarding whether the notion of existence if founded upon reminiscence or repetition. If Kierkegaard admirably discerns in that opposition the difference between Antiquity's conception of man and the modern conception of man, it appears that Freud makes the latter take its decisive step by ravishing the necessity included in this repetition from the human agent identified with consciousness. Since this repetition is symbolic repetition, it turns out that the symbol's order can no longer be conceived of there as constituted by man but must rather be conceived of as constituting him." (1966, p. 46; English p. 34)

So to unpack this again a bit, first, psychoanalysis is not merely the recuperation of the repressed, its recovery and thus its reminiscence – something else is at stake and Kierkegaard was lucidly on to it. And second, Freud makes a step beyond Kierkegaard by seeing in repetition not something that is propagated by 'the human agent identified with consciousness', but something that pushes the human agent beyond his/her will, so to speak, something not constituted by man but constituting him. Repetition, as symbolic, is seen as constitutive of the human – but, as opposed to Freud, something that is not to be re-inscribed in the domain of memory so as to do away with it, but something that insists at the core of the human and that psychoanalysis has to rely on.

Repetition is here identified with the symbolic order, and indeed there is always a repetition at the core of the symbolic – symbols are symbols, signs are signs, only by virtue of being repeatable and repeated, by their capacity of repetition, by the iterativity of signs. Yet, this is not the whole story, as Lacan will realize later, also with the great help of Kierkegaard. For if we take seriously Kierkegaard's insistence that what is being repeated is the sheer impossibility of repetition, then it follows that what is being repeated is precisely that what cannot be symbolized, what inherently escapes symbolization, the unsymbolizable as such. One encounters something in repetition that cannot be captured by symbols and signs, it cannot be pinned down by a signifier, and this is what ultimately lies at the core of repetition. Symbolizing it, inscribing it in the realm of the symbolic, pinning it to a signifier, would re-inscribe it into the realm of memory, make it available, assign it a place, fill in the lacuna, but the point is precisely to keep it as the unsymbolizable, as a gap that derails the symbolic, a negativity that cannot be recuperated, something that doesn't quite exist, but insists through the repetition of the symbols. This is where in the midst of the symbolic repetition there is something that points to the encounter of the real,

and this is where in the midst of repetition which is driven by the pleasure principle – to come back to the site of satisfaction, to get more of the same – there insists something that points to 'beyond the pleasure principle'.

One can link this with another Kierkegaardian thread left in suspense, his favorite topic of irony. The concept of irony, to cut it short, can be understood as the concept of negativity, yet of a negativity which would escape the pitfalls of the Hegelian negativity. It is a non-Hegelian, an anti-Hegelian negativity, that is, a negativity which would not be merely a passage and a transition. Hegel, as Kierkegaard understands him, conceives negativity as a transitory moment, it is always passing into something else, it is but a step on the way to a result, thus always on the way to its erasure. For Hegel Socrates himself is but a moment of transition, the transition between the principle of Antiquity and that of modernity, and his irony itself is but a transition. The negative force of irony, for Hegel, is the way in which subjectivity asserts its power, and he saw the Socratic 'tragic irony' in this light (TWA 18, p. 461 – as opposed to the then contemporary fashionable notion of romantic irony (Schlegel, Tieck, Novalis, Solger etc.) in which he merely saw hypocrisy, pretence, triviality, vanity, conceit, the arbitrary will of an inflated ego deeming itself superior to any particular determinations, which is always the immediate danger of any praise of irony and its alleged powers. Hegel went even so far that he saw in the Socratic irony the power to subvert any positive knowledge and opinion and submit it to 'inner destruction [*Zerstörung*]', so that ultimately it would coincide with the very notion dialectics itself as "the universal irony of the world [*allgemeine Ironie der Welt*])." (P. 460)[15] The Socratic irony, if properly understood, equals dialectics.

But this is not what Kierkegaard aims at with the concept of irony. Irony, understood in this way, is still but a transition on the way somewhere else, but Kierkegaard wants to stop there, not to proceed beyond it: "Instead of making constant assurances that the doubt has been overcome and the irony defeated, one would rather let them to express themselves for once." So

[15] "(All dialectics grants the validity of any claim to validity, [it acts] as if it was valid [*lässt das gelten, was gelten soll, als ob es gelte*], it leaves it to the development of its inner destruction [*Zerstörung*, disintegration] – the universal irony of the world [*allgemeine Ironie der Welt*])." (P. 460) This is precisely the method which Hegel programmatically put to use in the *Phenomenology of spirit*: to measure every figure of consciousness by its own standards, to assume its claims to validity of its propositions and let them run into contradiction, hence self-destruction, and hence lead to a new figure of consciousness.

the concept of irony is conceived as the anti-dialectic, it has to be read in opposition to *Aufhebung*, sublation. The irony is something that should not be *aufgehoben*, superseded, as for Kierkegaard it constantly is in the Hegelian use of dialectics. To dwell upon irony is to dwell on that hole bored into knowledge, which opens the space for the advent of truth, so Socrates the ironist is ultimately a different figure from the Socrates of reminiscence, *anamnesis* – the latter paves way for Hegel, the former resists Hegel. To turn irony against the Hegelian irony, which is, as we have seen, synonymous with dialectics, is particularly ironic. The dialectical irony digs holes into false knowledge, as Socrates tirelessly did when confronting the naive interlocutors or the anything-but-naive sophists, in order to produce the ascent towards the ideas, the true knowledge. Kierkegaard's irony rather leaves the holes, the lacks, the gaps, the flaws – it wants to introduce a tiny gap between actuality and reason, the two entities that Hegel equates in the famous formula ('what is reasonable is actual, what is actual is reasonable'), between the essence and appearance, between sense and meaning (*betydning/mening*), it wants to keep a crack open between the two, it tries to hold on to the moment before the negative force yields a positive result in successful supersession. It wants to hold on to the production of truth as opposed to the production of knowledge, to put it short. For Kierkegaard, the Socratic principle of irony is the stumbling block of dialectics, it opens the space for excess and discontinuity, and in that gap truth can emerge.

There is on the one hand the Socrates of reminiscence, of anamnesis, the establishment of a chain of continuity; the Socrates of Platonic tradition of which Hegel is the last heir. And there is on the other hand the Socrates of irony, of gap and discontinuity, of a passage which is not a dialectical passage, but a 'pathetic passage' – a leap out from continuity, not the passage (of negative into positive, of quantity into quality etc.). This is the proper location of truth as a leap which cannot spring from any previous cause, but is rather a jump out of causality, the break with what was already there. There is no objective knowledge, no warranty, no rule, no security of outcome – for Kierkegaard this is where faith proceeds into the unknown, introducing a break. No event of truth can be explained by what was there already in itself, it is not a conclusion of some deduction or an evolvement from a nutshell, it always contains more than the premises. This is why the Socrates of reminiscence is only the midwife for something already eternally there, while Socrates the ironist, with his capacity of dismantling the established knowledge, is the midwife for the new. There is a tension in the figure of Socrates.

What is the link between repetition and irony? On the face of it, repetition would seem to be as far removed as possible from this break and the leap, yet there is irony pertaining already to the minimal move of repetition, and maybe repetition presents irony at its minimal. Between one occurrence and the next, which seems but to repeat the same, there is a gap, and through this gap the second time is never the same as the first one. There is a supreme irony in this, and irony, if we look at it from that angle, can at the simplest function as an echo. One can rely on very common experience: if one merely echoes the proffered words, this inevitably strikes them with irony and undermines them. The voice is echoed, and the echo, far from being the fading of the voice, its extenuation, more of the same, only less so, is the way that repetition produces a new message, everything can be submitted to irony just by being echoed.

> "Oh Echo, yes Echo, thou great master of irony! You who parody in yourself the highest and deepest on earth: the Word which created the world, since you merely give the contour not the fullness. … Yes, Echo, you whom I once heard chastise a nature lover when he exclaimed: 'Hear yonder, the lonesome flute tones of a lovelorn nightingale' (*Nattergal*) – and you answered: 'Mad' (*gal*)." (Papirer III, B 2, p. 160)

The voice is answered by the echo and it seems that the echo brings only a contour, a pale shadow of the original, yet in that shadow there is a surplus, something that has the form of an unexpected answer (like 'less is more'). The voice obtains a 'supplement' in the echo, which merely repeats it, but thereby it displaces it and transforms it, it produces more than what was enclosed in the original.[16] This is the irony of repetition: one merely repeats the same, yet the repeated thing alters with repetition – it brings new and unexpected meaning by just echoing, like *gal*; or it pales with each repetition and becomes ridiculous; or it alters with repetition and changes its meaning; or it is elevated to the dignity of the sublime by mere repetition – maybe all these, unpredictably and erratically. What is at stake is not just the production of a new and unexpected meaning through echo, but rather a gap in meaning, and an excess which dwells in this gap as if produced by it, between one occurrence and the next. There is like a subjective position that goes along with it, an ethical stance, one could call it the ethics of the echo – to

[16] Kierkegaard's example, *nattergal – gal*, has a long and prestigious history, stretching back to the *locus princeps* in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the episode featuring precisely the nymph Echo who could only repeat the said, but managed nevertheless to say everything just by echoing, striking every utterance with irony. *Ante, ait, emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri*, says Narcissus, 'I would rather die than let myself fall prey to you'. To which Echo merely replies: *sit tibi copia nostri*, 'let myself fall prey to you'.

make oneself an echo, to turn into echo: perhaps this is the best antidote against the nostalgia of the lost origin and the helpless effort to recapture by memory what has always already eluded us, and from which we are irretrievably cut. And to make a quick short-circuit to psychoanalysis, what else is the position of the analyst but the stance of turning oneself into a soundless echo of what is said, and thereby transforming it?[17] Isn't the position of the analyst akin to Echo in relation to the Narcissus of the analyzand? This is the minimal wager of psychoanalysis, the minimal move of irony – not as the smiling conceit but as the force of insistent negativity – joining forces with the minimal move of repetition.

This is where psychoanalysis rather joins forces with Kierkegaard, regardless of Freud's reliance on memory against repetition. For what is at stake is not the restoration of the past that one can't remember and which therefore keeps haunting us, nor the loss of some primordial enjoyment that one cannot recover, but the working through of one's life with all its pitfalls through repetition, a repetition that one cannot master and which insists at the core of our being and requires fidelity to it. Analysis itself is but a stage of repetition as working through, *durcharbeiten*, a place of reenactment of all past knots and traumas, not filling in all the gaps in view of a seamless restoration of meaning. Its aim is not the recovery of some lost meaning, but leaving the gap open where a truth can emerge, allowing for the production of novelty and transformation, opening a space of freedom at the most unlikely spot in the midst of repetition, and, who knows, for the flicker of happiness that Kierkegaard firmly believed to have a close and intimate tie with repetition.

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[17] Kierkegaard's fragment from *Papirer* begins like this: "Each time I wish to say something there is another who says it at the very same moment. It is as though *I thought double*, and my other self continually stole a march on me." Thus the echo is already interior to the said, it is tacitly inscribed in its first occurrence, the utterance is in itself already intertwined with its own echo, my voice is redoubled with the echo from the outset, the voice is 'always already' a split voice. To follow this line, repetition would always be the repetition of a repetition, repeating the repetition that accompanied the first time, making explicit that the first occurrence was not equal to itself, or simply contemporary to itself, that it was always already the echo of itself and in itself. Thus repetition would only repeat the initial split of the original, a real that emerged in it and which is neither an identity nor a difference, but something that emerged in the initial redoubling, yet irreducible to either the original or its echo.